Univerzita Karlova

Filozofická fakulta

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Bakalářská práce

Pavla Zídková

Tier-y Blues: Langston Hughes's Poetics of Blackness

Rozmanité blues: Poetika Langston Hughese

Praha 2021 Vedoucí práce: Prof. David Lee Robbins, PhD

Prohlášení:

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the source of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze, dne 15. August 2021

Pavla Zídková

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, prof. David L. Robbins, for his patient guidance, valuable feedback, and many insightful suggestions.

Abstrakt

Od první poloviny dvacátých let si takzvané „New Negro“ hnutí kladlo za cíl zachytit měnící se vědomí afroamerické identity. Na základě nových filozofických a estetických hodnot určených jeho představiteli, mezi které patří například dr. Alain Locke či dr. W. E. B. DuBois, vzniká kulturní směr nazvaný „Harlemská renesance“. Tato práce zkoumá vztah mezi poetikou Langstona Hughese, obvykle považovaného za jednoho z vrcholných představitelů „Harlemské renesance“, a idejemi, jak je formulují členové již zmíněného hnutí v určující antologii *The New Negro*. Primárními zdroji pro komparaci jsou Hughesovy básně vydané mezi lety 1926-1942, tedy díla z jeho první sbírky *Unavené blues* až po sbírku *Shakespeare v Harlemu* – takto určený rozsah zhruba odpovídá začátku a přesahuje konec „Harlemské renesance“ a dobu, kdy hnutí „New Negro“ dosáhlo svého vrcholu; vybraný materiál tedy dovoluje posoudit, jak se změny afroamerické senzibility a (ne)spokojenost s vývojem tohoto hnutí odráží v Hughesově poezii.

První kapitola poskytuje teoretický základ pro evaluaci Hughesovy poezie, neboť se snaží postihnout některé aspekty afroamerické literární tradice a pozadí vzniku hnutí „New Negro“. Současně se věnuje estetice, jak ji vnímá sám Langston Hughes, čímž naznačuje potenciální body rozporu mezi směřováním hnutí a Hughesovými hodnotami na obecné úrovni. Další tři kapitoly se zaměřují přímo na samotnou poezii. V celkovém pořadí druhá kapitola se soustředí na afroamerickou komunitu v Hughesových básních, její identitu, historicitu a odkaz. Další kapitola uvádí tuto komunitu do kontextu Americké demokracie, dotýká se tedy témat institucionálního rasismu a segregace, ale i významu „Amerického snu“ a jeho implikací pro tuto komunitu. Poslední kapitola nabízí pohled na Hughesův inovativní přístup k afroamerické hudbě a její vliv na jeho poetiku. Tato práce si tedy klade za cíl vytvořit komplexní obraz kritické analýzy Hughesovy ranější tvorby jako reflektivního materiálu doby afroamerického „spirituálního procitnutí“.

Klíčová slova:

New Negro, Harlemská renesance, afroamerická komunita, afroamerická literatura, afroamerická poezie, jazz, blues, rasismus, segregace, demokracie, literární modernismus, básnická forma

Abstract:

In the first half of the 1920s, the New Negro movement aimed to capture the changing African American consciousness of the times. Based on the aesthetic and philosophical thoughts articulated by its representatives, among whom the most central figures were Alain Locke and W. E. B. DuBois, a new artistic movement arose – the so-called "Harlem Renaissance". This study is an initial attempt to investigate the relationship between the poetics of Langston Hughes (since Hughes is generally considered one of the most prominent representatives of the "Harlem Renaissance") and the "New Negro" aesthetic ideas as outlined in the movement's defining anthology, *The New Negro*. The primary material considered consists of Hughes's poems published between 1926, when his first collection, *The Weary Blues*, was published, and 1942, marked by appearance of his collection *Shakespeare in Harem*. The choice to analyse this particular range of Hughes's writing reflects the focus of the thesis – these works were published during and several years after the philosophical predominance of the New Negro movement and the peak of its principal aesthetic manifestation, the "Harlem Renaissance." The chosen corpus allows us to assess the transformation of African American sensibility and recognise the achievements and/or failures and frustrations of both movements' development.

The first part of the thesis offers a theoretical contextualisation of Hughes's poetry, because it is specifically concerned with the African American literary tradition and the historical background of the rise of the movements. This section also introduces Langston Hughes's ideas about literary aesthetics, thus establishing a theoretical background for critical evaluation of his poetry. The chapters that follow focus on Hughes's poetry. The first examines the African American community as depicted in Hughes's poetry, its identity, historicity, heritage, and folk art. The second considers this community in a larger framework of the American experience: the social and economic implications of the American Dream, its (un)fulfilment in the African American community, institutionalised racism, and segregation. The last chapter discusses Hughes's specific and innovative interest in jazz and the blues, both in terms of poetic form and thematic orientation. This thesis hopes to offer a unified critical analysis of

Hughes's earlier artistic contributions as material reflective of the African American "spiritual awakening".

Key words:

New Negro, Harlem Renaissance, African American community, African American literature, African American poetry, jazz, blues, racism, segregation, democracy, literary modernism, poetic form

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Langston Hughes, even though his career spanned more than five decades and exceeded the "Harlem Renaissance" period, is generally praised for being one of the most representative authors of the movement. Hughes was an unusually prolific and multi-talented author of prose, drama, and poetry, whose writing career began in the early 1920s and was thus inevitably influenced by ideas about art promoted by the New Negro movement, which established the philosophical background of the "Harlem Renaissance". Hughes's poetics can be deceitfully simple, and yet they inspired American writers of the following generations, from the Beats to the activist authors of the Civil Rights Movement. Hughes's poems, plays, and fiction purport to interpret the American experience in its numerous hues from the African American perspective, with affection and compassion for the black community, its aspirations, and its plights.

Choosing the "low-down" folks as his primary inspiration and audience, Hughes was often criticised by his contemporaries and reviewers. Even though his early poetry is influenced by the New Negro movement and its ideas, Hughes found his own voice very early in his career and, to some extent, formed a definite opinion against the movement's agenda. The present thesis aims to illuminate Hughes's relationship to the so-called "Harlem Renaissance," especially its philosophical basis as articulated by "New Negro" thinkers. By employing complementary and sometimes contentious critical methodologies, i. e. close reading and historical contextualisation of Hughes's poetry published at the beginning and several years after the New Negro movement and its aesthetic product, the "Harlem Renaissance", reached its peak – poetry published between 1926 and 1942 – the thesis will discuss to what extent Hughes is representative of the "Harlem Renaissance" period and its ideology, and how he reflects its achievements and deficiencies. The textual source that will provide the basis for the juxtaposition of Hughes's poetry with its creative environment is *The New Negro* anthology, edited by Dr. Alain Locke. Unlike prose or drama, poetry demands a condensed form and an intensified meaning; and, despite these exigencies, Hughes maintained both a high volume and a high quality of poetic production throughout

his long literary career. For these reasons, I have chosen to focus my analysis on it, rather than on the other diverse genres employed by Hughes, as particularly representative, expressive, and revealing of his core concerns.

The present thesis has four parts: the first chapter provides a brief survey of the politics of African American literary tradition and the genesis and aspirations of the New Negro movement. These aspects are contrasted with Hughes's own ideas about the role of African American art as he articulates it in several essays on the topic. The theoretical background's having been established, the following chapters centre around Hughes's poetry itself. The second chapter examines Hughes's relationship to the African American community, how he describes/imagines its history, character, and value. The third chapter connects this community with the larger framework of American society: How Hughes nuances the fragile, fraught relationship of the Black community to the white, and to the promises of (white) American democracy, constitutes the central concern of this part which also necessarily touches upon the issues of institutionalised racism and segregation—and Hughes's exploration of them. The last chapter attempts to decode yet another aspect of Hughes's attitude towards African American culture, specifically his use of music as a thematic and formal element in his poetry. The merit of the work undertaken in this thesis, I would suggest, resides in its critical evaluation of Hughes's position within the extraordinary period of "Harlem Renaissance" and in its efforts to trace Hughes's own voice beyond the New Negro aesthetic ideology.

2. Afro-American Literary Tradition and the Rise of the "New Negro"

From the very beginning, the Afro-American literary tradition has constituted not only a matter of aesthetic achievements but a distinctly political statement as well[1]. One of the earliest, most influential, and exemplary products in this tradition was Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. In it, Douglass draws a direct link between literacy and freedom[2]. His master acknowledges that ignorance and lack of education are what makes slavery possible – spiritual dependency produces physical dependency. When Douglass recognised the power of knowledge, ironically enough pointed out to him by his master, he realised that the only way to step out of slavery spiritually, and consequently physically as well, was to educate himself.

Douglass's autobiography quickly became a tool for abolitionists to promote their agenda[3]. On the one hand, the work presents a "self-made" man writing in a high style, a man who is apparently capable of intellectual engagements and has an intellectual capacity equal to whites. Considered against the backdrop of deeply rooted myths and stereotypes created by a particular group of privileged whites about slaves' inferiority to the white society in every aspect possible, Douglass's narrative touches a raw nerve. Henry Louis Gates Jr. claims that "[l]iteracy – the literacy of formal writing – was both a technology and a commodity. It was a commodity with which the African's right to be considered a human being could be traded"[4]. However, Douglass's work is not only a manifestation of humanity, but it also reveals complexities and psychological impacts of slavery on all the participants of the "relationship". Slavery, Douglass claims, dehumanises both the

[1] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xxxi.
[2] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 78.
[3] Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Introduction," in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 9.
[4] Gates, *Figures in Black*, 11.

slave and the master: every "cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon [becomes] red with rage"[5].

If the writing of the marginalised served those who proclaimed betterment for this group, it could be considered one of the liberating forces or means of freedom. Moreover, art is the product of self-expression – it can help create a "common ground", a network of stories supporting collective imagination, strengthening the bond between individual members of a community. A recreation of forcefully forgotten heritage is a crucial part of the quest for one's identity. However, the result of this quest created much tension within the "Negro"[6] community. In the decades following the abolition of slavery, there was no consensus among "Negro" leaders on how to proceed with the interracial relationship and assertion of equality. Towards the turn of the 19th century, three main movements occurred, each of them under one leader, though contradictions within these movements and overlaps to other tendencies are not uncommon.

The first tendency flourished under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, whose politics another leader of the younger generation, W. E B. Du Bois, criticises in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*. The merit of Du Bois's work resides not only in its linguistic refinement but also in the articulation of the contention between the established leadership and young "Negro" intellectuals[7]. Du Bois's main reproach for Washington's politics was based on the problematic "self-reliant" and submissive approach that Washington advises to the liberated slaves and African Americans in general. According to Du Bois, "Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races."[8] In the time of development and need of assertion for "Negro" rights, Washington advocates collaboration with and political/social submission to whites to give

[5] Douglass, *Narrative*, 78.
[6] When referring to persons of African descent, I will be using the term "Negro", Afro-American or black interchangeably. The term "Negro" is used primarily because most of the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals self-identified as "Negroes". In many cases, the term "African-American" fails to capture the complexity of the "New Negro" movement – some of the authors and thinkers were not of African descent. The term will be always given in inverted commas to indicate that it is borrowed, and to bring the awareness of readers to the fact that it is an outdated racial label.
[7] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 19.
[8] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Gorham: Myers Education Press, 2018), 59, EBSCO.

African Americans access to financial resources, which, over time, would ensure full participation of African Americans. Washington's propaganda resulted in the exact opposite of what Du Bois thought essential for the improvement of the race – they lost franchise, the mental capabilities of the "Negro" continue to be regarded as inferior, the education is no longer supported by (white, i.e. wealthier) institutions[9]. Another bone of contention was reconciliation with whites – W. E. B. Du Bois thinks it necessary to bear the atrocities of slavery in mind; the contrary would signalise approval of these practices and suppression of indispensable sociological and historical knowledge. Du Bois is less assimilationist than Washington, and yet he holds white middle-class values as the aim Africans Americans, or at least the "talented tenth", should pursue.

Apparently, the upcoming younger generation of "Negro" intellectuals is more assertive, and Du Bois becomes its leader. Huggins claims that "it was the glaring failure of Washington's model for black advancement that had galvanised blacks into action"[10]. There was, however, to Du Bois's displeasure[11], one more tendency – Marcus Garvey's politics of pan-Africanism. Garvey's agenda consisted in escape, or rather return of the noble race of African Americans back to "their" land (or, if not to Africa, at least to "their" culture, cultivated in black enclaves in American cities) where they could create Black population, cultural, economic, and perhaps even political spaces, where they would not be oppressed by whites anymore[12]. Important tools, particularly from a Du Boisian perspective, for political and cultural action were three prominent "Negro" magazines – *The Crisis* (NAACP, 1910-present), whose editor (1910-1934) was Du Bois, *Opportunity* (Urban League, 1923-1949, Charles S. Johnson, ed.), and *The Messenger* (independent socialist/labor unionist/Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1917-1928, A. Philip Randolph, ed.)[13]. These periodicals "sponsored a literary contest in the 1920s that became a major generating force for the [Harlem] renaissance"[14].

[9] Du Bois, *Souls*, 60.
[10] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 20.
[11] Huggins comments: "And while DuBois carefully nurtured the image of a Negro leadership of reason, intelligence, and balance, Garvey was to DuBois's mind cutting the fool before the world." (Harlem Renaissance, 47)
[12] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 42.
[13] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 29.
[14] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 29.

Already in the 1890s, as George Hutchinson aptly remarks[15], "Negro" intellectuals regarded themselves as "New Negroes", having radically different ideas from those of their predecessors about the political and social direction to embark on. However, the term "New Negro" was popularised mainly after WW I: in 1925, a special issue of *Survey Graphic* was released, the original edition entitled "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro", but later expanded and published simply as *The New Negro* anthology[16]. After the publication of this anthology, the associations of the term "New Negro" became cultural and artistic as well as political. "Negro" artists and intellectuals created a new set of ideas and concepts, which they needed to convey not only to their fellow "Negroes" but to white masses (or at least white "middle classes" and/or "intellectuals") as well.

What is the "New Negro", then, and why did Alain Locke and the people around him feel the need to create such a concept? In his "Foreword" and the introductory essay "The New Negro", Locke mentions the main reason for the publication of the anthology: it should be a document of both inner and outer change; the aim is to capture the social and cultural revolution within the "Negro" community. The mass movement to the north (the so-called "Great Migration") is not the only change "Negroes" were undergoing – with this demographic change came also a change in their psyche and consciousness[17], legibly reflected in artistic self-expression[18]. For example, Huggins claims credit for these processes of change mainly to war: "[African Americans] had served their nation, and now they would insist on being treated like full citizens"[19]. The new generations of "Negro" people were unwilling to listen to empty promises; they were resolved to fight for their rights because their social responsibilities were the same as those of whites, which they successfully proved in military service.

[15] George Hutchinson, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.
[16] Emily Bernard, "The Renaissance and the Vogue," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34.
[17] Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 3.
[18] Locke, "The New Negro", 4-5.
[19] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 54.

The "Negro" comes from the "Age of Discussion" to the "Age of Expression"[20] – rather than being an object of debate, he becomes the participant and the creator of the discussion. To capture this change is also to capture the true nature of the "Negro". For far too long, Locke believes, "Negroes" were only a problem for the white society. But this "problem" was only an embodiment of concepts that white supremacy created: "the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy"[21]. In other words, the "Old Negro" was utterly a creation, a construct of white men, "Old Negroes" could not and did not have any true identity because of suppression and inferiority[22]. Now, the task of the "New Negro" was to establish identity and upon this finding, to articulate their needs, and finally, to strive for improvement on every level possible. The concept of the "Old Negro" has to be replaced; and most importantly, proven to be an obsolete concept.

This, of course, cannot be achieved only by "Negroes" themselves. Self-recognition is a part of the process; but the engagement of white society is desirable and necessary as well – they are those who have to recognise the "New Negro". Here we can observe continuities similar to what happened after the publication of Douglass's *Narrative*. The concept of the "New Negro" is serving both "Negroes", for self-definition produced by easily identifiable artistic expression, and whites, as proof of the worth of the "New Negro"[23]. However, this twofold focus creates interesting aesthetic and ideological debates on art, artists, and (New) "Negro" representation.

The cultural contribution, Locke believes, "must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships"[24], demonstrate the spiritual development of the "Negro" and rewrite the obsolete narratives written by others, primarily whites. The "Negro Youth", he proposes, should enrich the social vision with realistic rendering of racial issues and build a positive self-identity instead of

[20] William S. Braithwaite, "The Negro in American Literature," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 31.
[21] Locke, "The New Negro", 3.
[22] Locke, "The New Negro", 4.
[23] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 64-65.
[24] Locke, "The New Negro", 15.

the one employed by generations of their predecessors, be it white artists or those of race[25]. On the other hand, Du Bois accentuates the need to deal with the "Negro" past in a way that would be exempt from the dependency on the recognition from white audiences, but at the same time supports the approximation of Black speech and behaviour to its "white" counterparts. Conversely, William S. Braithwaite is very sensitive to depiction of the "Negro" past and, in particular, to stereotypical and sentimental elements in it. "Negro" artists should strive for a higher artistic value than for the realism of their art: "Negro poetic expression hovers for the moment, pardonably perhaps, over the race problem, but its highest allegiance is to Poetry – it must soar."[26] Obviously, there was an ongoing debate whether art should overlap into the realm of propaganda and vice versa, or whether it should "[advocate] ideas of literary excellence derived often from late Victorian poetic standards"[27]. One particular view on "Negro" art provoked a response from one of the most representative Harlemites.

2.1 Langston Hughes, the Literary Critic

In his caustic essay "The Negro-Art Hokum", George S. Schulyer introduces the idea that distinctively American "Negro" art is practically non-existent[28]. Some cultural contributions of the "Negro" cannot be denied. Still, these certainly do not capture any general "Negro" soul or spirit of the race – American "Negroes" are too specific to represent the whole race. By their separation from Africa, "Negroes" lost what could define them as a race: there is no longer a difference between "Aframericans" and whites because both groups are in the same cultural blender, under the same European influence. Moreover, the distinction between "Negro" and white society is a legacy of slavery, and thus supports racism. By propagating distinctively "Negro" art, black artists support this racism and point out difference that is nonsensical.

[25] Locke, "Negro Youth Speaks," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 48-50.
[26] Braithwaite, "The Negro in American Literature", 40.
[27] Gates, *Figures in Black*, xxiii.
[28] George S. Schulyer, "The Negro-Art Hokum," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 24-26.

Though Langston Hughes is one the most anthologised and representative participants in the "Harlem Renaissance" and the "New Negro" movement that went with it, he differs in several respects from his contemporaries. Though many "New Negro" leaders proposed artistic freedom for black expression, they were mostly college-educated and, in fact, wanted a refined "Negro" art[29], which is, of course, related to the racial self-doubt that plagued "Harlem Renaissance" representatives. Some authors, such as Claude McKay or Countee Cullen, wrote many poems using the received forms and universal themes, transcending the race and experience of everyday life, finding inspiration in classical works of literature. On the other hand, Hughes scorned this hypocrisy and the condescension of the black middle and upper classes. Both on the artistic and personal level[30], he refuses pretence, and the sources of Hughes's imagination and expression were not so much based on European cultural influences and the "high" art in general. He was a "folk" poet who does not try to transcend race but rather indulges in the "ordinary Negro's" peculiarity and beauty. In Huggins's words, Langston Hughes insists "that Negro art would be achieved through capturing the common black man's experience in art forms."[31]

Though "Harlem Renaissance" artists and critics have seen the importance of folk art for the emerging new culture, they hardly supported art forms such as jazz and blues. Many[32] mentioned spirituals as the best "Negro" contribution to American art, but except for Hughes, none of them took jazz and blues seriously. As Huggins notices, "[i]t is very ironic that a generation that was searching for a new Negro and his distinctive cultural expression would have passed up the only really creative thing that was going on" [33]. Hughes uses folk art to create a new awareness of race and racial pride.

[29] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black Author(s)," *Representations*, no. 24 (Autumn 1988): 136. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928478
[30] Langston Hughes, *Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 206-209.
[31] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 78.
[32] Alain Locke dedicated a whole chapter in *The New Negro* to spirituals; Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 21.
[33] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 10-11.

The basis of Hughes's aesthetics is expressed in his counterstatement to Schuyler's "Negro-Art Hokum". In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"[34], Hughes clearly recognises the presence and necessity of racially distinct art. He believes that "elevating" black art by imitating the dominant white culture would only disservice the "Negro" culture because it would prove the long-standing implications of whites' superiority. Hughes's racial mountain is an image of both racism "from within" and the lack of confidence in one's racial identity, which won't allow any improvement. By avoiding expressing the "Negro" heritage, blacks deprive themselves of an essential part of their identity and allow what Schuyler proposes – erasing the difference between races. These practices are mostly those of the middle and upper classes of "Negroes", and Hughes, therefore, decides to focus on the "low-down folks". Hughes's artistic and personal world is that of the "ordinary Negro", that of "Seventh Street" which is

> the long, old, dirty street, where the ordinary Negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all, folks who draw no color line between mulattoes and deep dark-browns, folks who work hard for a living with their hands.[35]

His poetry is folk in both matter and form. To create art that would be accessible for those whom it concerned and was primarily meant for, Hughes had to adopt their forms of expression. Therefore, he extensively uses vernacular English or blues forms. This artistic choice may produce what some critics condemn: Hughes's verse resists academical analysis because it lacks pretension – it is too simple and uncomplicated.[36]

Very early on, Hughes recognised the bizarre dynamic of "Negro" leadership – in his view, leaders did not speak for the masses, but only for the people like them, i. e. middle and upper class educated people, and dismissed the great majority of common "Negroes". Hughes adopted the opposite strategy – his poetry

[34] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and Racial Mountain," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 27-30.
[35] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 208.
[36] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 226.

communicates concerns, habits, and aspirations of lower-class "Negroes" – it presents the diversity of the black community, resonates with voices of busboys, dancers, blues singers, lovelorn women, and penniless tenants. When some "Negro" leaders endeavoured to show only the idealised and flawless "New Negro", Hughes strove for balance. He realises that showing only the "better selves", to "put their best foot forward, their politely polished and cultural foot – and only that foot"[37] would be hypocritical and false, so to the displeasure of some of his peers who were sensitive to depiction of the race because the picture of the "Negro" was so many times abused and ridiculed[38], he shows the community realistically. This approach appeared to him as essential for betterment of the race, because it reveals the place that should be improved.

Not only did Hughes feel the discrepancy in the views and interests of the "Negro" intelligentsia and the everyday reality of lower classes, he also felt the need to differentiate his artistic vision from that of the older generation. He thought that the generation of Du Bois and Locke was still too dependent on white audiences. With several contemporaries, he decided to publish a new magazine, *Fire!!*, that would

> burn up a lot of the old, dead conventional Negro-white ideas of the past (...) and provide [them] with an outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing, the Crisis, Opportunity, and the Messenger – the first two being house organs of inter-racial organisations, and the latter being God knows what.[39]

Even though this attempt failed, this affair proves that Hughes held revolutionary ideas about creating purely black art that would affirm Afro-Americans as an ethnically distinct part within the American national and cultural paradigm.

Though Hughes was convinced about the social responsibility of the poet and his art[40], he was equally conscious that art in itself cannot solve institutionalised

[37] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 267.
[38] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 266-7.
[39] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 235-6.
[40] Langston Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," *Phylon* 8, no. 3 (Third Quarter, 1947): 205. https://www.jstor.org/stable/272335

racism or lead to development in the economic well-being of "Negroes". He very much objected to the leaders for their incompetency to resolve (or at least initiate the change that would lead to resolving) the problems he addressed in his poetry:

> [The intellectuals] thought the race problem had at last been solved through Art plus Gladys Bentley. (...) I don't know what made any Negro think that – except that they were mostly intellectuals doing the thinking. The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any.[41]

The "Harlem Renaissance" failed to spark any practical social change; moreover, in some cases, it contributed to the deteriorating situation of the ordinary "Negro", who became the source of entertainment for white New Yorkers, which finally led to commercialisation of the black art:

> [N]ow the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers – like amusing animals in zoo. (...) The old magic of the woman and the piano and the night and the rhythm being one is gone. But everything goes, one way or another. The 20's are gone and lots of fine things in Harlem night life have disappeared like snow in the sun – since it became utterly commercial, planned for the downtown tourist trade, and therefore dull.[42]

[41] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 228.
[42] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 225-6.

3. Black, Brown & Beige: Langston Hughes's Community

It has already been suggested that Hughes believed in authenticity, because only from authenticity can spring great art. For Hughes, authenticity could be found only within the circles of lower-class African Americans – the higher in the social ranks, the more blacks tend to abandon their true nature in favour of American standardization: that is, they aim to have "Nordic manners, Nordic faces, Nordic hair, Nordic art"[43]. Hughes's artistic approach is on the opposite side of the scale; he embraces the African American identity with love, and most importantly, decides to be as honest and true to it as possible. He believes that the black community is different from white, and it is equally valuable and important for the American cultural paradigm.

Throughout his writing, Hughes is trying to build a community consciousness that would support this claim, and which would weld the community together. As he himself remarks, the problem of the "color line" is not only a problem of American society in general, i.e. of interracial relationships, but also a problem of the black society[44]. Hughes attempts to create a real connection between the "Negro" people, and persuade them about their beauty, but also about the complexity of their culture, which is far from the ethnic cultural blandness that was considered as "the American culture"[45]. One result of this broad artistic rendering is the dissipation of approaching African Americans as a homogeneous group where an individual represents the whole race. Very few, if any, poems from Hughes's earlier work display a collective character[46]. But staying true to life means depicting also the aspects of African American life that were highly

[43] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (Ney York: New York University Press, 2000), 28.
[44] Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", 28.
[45] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 62.
[46] Huggins remarks on the problem of collectivity versus individuality in *Harlem Renaissance*: "If anything, there was more at stake, for the black man carried not only the burden of self but also that of race. It was thought, and expected, that every individual success was exemplary. By the same token, every failure was not only an individual tragedy but evidence of racial limitation." (257)

controversial in light of the debate about American history, and therefore potentially displeasing to the "Negro" masses.

We can find many poems in Hughes's oeuvre that seem to affirm stereotypes imposed on blacks by whites during the slavery period. Poems such as "Kid Sleepy", "Brief Encounter", "Harlem Sweeties" or "Red Silk Stockings" seemingly invite reaffirmation of African Americans as lazy, violent, lacking moral values, and sexually unregulated. These poems, however, serve two purposes: either to allow Hughes to reveal the state of the whole society, which does nothing to prevent or eradicate social and economic determinism[47]; or to allow him, by revisiting the stereotypes, to restate them as a natural part of community, by no means as something unusual. Hughes therefore reveals the stereotypes as created social constructs and purges them of their unpleasant connotations.

To convey his message and unify the African American consciousness, Hughes had to employ certain poetic strategies, both in terms of style and themes. As for example Jones remarks, Hughes's poetry is in some critical circles deemed too simple and unlearned[48]. Towards Hughes's "simplistic" approach to poetry, Rampersad remarks: "[Hughes] fashioned an aesthetic simplicity born out of the speech, music, and actual social condition of his people"[49]. Hughes does not use complicated images and figures, rarely discusses abstract ideas in an abstract way. But his poetry comes from and for masses that had very restricted access to education; therefore, to meet this political demand of his art, he had to make his poetry as transparent and as easy to decipher as possible. However, in analysing his poetry in the historical context of the New Negro movement, Hughes's poetic and imaginative powers emerge.

[47] In *The Big Sea*, Hughes comments: "An ironic poem like "Red Silk Stockings" [the critics] took for literal advice." (266)
[48] Meta DuEwa Jones, "Listening to What the Ear Demands: Langston Hughes and His Critics," *Callaloo* 25, no. 4 (Autumn, 2002): 1147. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3300277
[49] Arnold Rampersad, "Langston Hughes," in *Voices & Visions: The Poet in America*, ed. Helen Vendler (New York: Random House, 1987): 392.

If Locke in his introductory essay to *The New Negro* anthology appeals to young artists for free artistic expression of the "Negro" masses, and most importantly, to speak for themselves, Hughes takes Locke's words literally and employs this approach in the formal level of his writing. Besides standard English, some of Hughes's poetry is heavily dependent on the authentic everyday communication of the "Negro" masses – be it a linguistic or musical expression. Many of Hughes's poetry record the vernacular forms and dialect of the Harlem streets, as for example, in "Mother to Son":

> Don't you set down on the steps
> 'Cause you find it's kinder hard.
> Don't you fall now –
> For I'se still goin', honey
> I'se still climbin',
> And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Hughes is not the first poet to use this technique; however, it is an effective one. Not only does Hughes speak about the "low-down folks", he uses their own language. We see dropping of the *-ing* endings, multiple negations, the general negator "ain't", abbreviation of "because" and ungrammatical use of the auxiliary verb *is* with the pronoun *I*. To give the monologue authenticity, it cannot appear in standard English – the language Hughes uses reveals much about the speaker and stresses the message of her speech. R. Baxter Miller concludes that "the poem provides the folk diction and rhythm that make the woman real"[50].

Besides colloquial language, Hughes extensively uses musical forms as emblems of the black community. Both jazz and blues as structural and thematic devices will be closely analysed in the last chapter of the thesis. Especially at the beginning of Hughes's writing career, he uses images of African ancestry, and later, as his poetry gains much more political and protest undertones, the thematic orientation of this later poetry is influenced by social issues of African American masses within the American democracy. Before he addresses these problems in his poetry, Hughes dedicates a large part of his oeuvre to the "Negro" identity, history, and heritage.

[50] R. Baxter Miller, *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 35.

For Hughes, race is not only a matter of physical appearance, but also a question of cultural heritage. Especially at the start of his career, Hughes's writing reveals a tendency to turn to Africa as a valuable source of artistic inspiration. Several essays in *The New Negro* are concerned with the link between African American art and Africa. Alain Locke in "The Legacy of the Ancestral Past" encourages African American authors in using motifs or forms of African art as an integral part of their work. Though it might have seemed so to many artists, Locke claims that "the Negro is not a cultural foundling without his own inheritance"[51] – to find not only cultural ancestry, artists should turn to Africa and reconnect with what was essentially their heritage.

Huggins brings to awareness the fact that when the "Negro" intellectuals were attempting to build a new racial consciousness and culture, they stood before a problem of African-American past within the framework of American history[52]. He points out that the period of slavery made the "Negro" rootless and feeling that the community lacked any cultural past in America. As Arthur A. Schomburg remarks in his essay "The Negro Digs Up His Past", the same applies to history as such[53]. A very natural response to this lack of valuable material within the American past leads many authors and intellectuals to seek refuge at one point in history that was certain – the origins of race in Africa.

Schomburg also voices the spirit of the New Negro movement in the following quote: "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future"[54]. This claim agrees with Locke's urge to revisit the racial discourse and purge it of the sediment of prejudice. Schomburg, however, does not confine himself as regards racial stereotypes, but instigates discussion around the "Negro" past as well. He claims that

[51] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Past," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 256.
[52] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 79-82.
[53] Arthur A. Schomburg says: "The Negro has been without a history because he has been considered a man without worthy culture," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 237.
[54] Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past", 231.

[t]here is the definite desire and determination to have a history, well documented, widely known at least within race circles, administered as a stimulating and inspiring tradition for the coming generations[55]

Hughes, with several of his poems, recreates this history, but also racial self-awareness, and identity.

3.1 Histories, Place, and Community

"Aunt Sue's Stories" (1921) is a poem presenting the archetype of a caring woman educating a young boy in the history of his race:

> Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
> Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
> Summer nights on the front porch
> Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
> And tells him stories.[56]

There is an emphasis on the intergenerational bond and most importantly, on orality. Voice serves as a transcendental tool, passing information from generation to generation, moving between temporalities, presenting real and inviting to imagine histories of the people. The poem is framed by present, but the middle passage revives the history of slavery:

> Black slaves,
> Working in the hot sun,
> And black slaves
> Walking in the dewy night night,
> And black slaves
> Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
> Mingle themselves softly
> In the flow of old Aunt Sue's voice

Aunt Sue is passing authentic histories, since the things she says are "[o]ut of any book at all" (24), but realities of black life as she knows it. And yet, the shadows of slaves as described by the woman "cross and recross / Aunt Sue's stories", definitely susceptible to recreation in one's imagination. Slaves are depicted as

[55] Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past", 231.
[56] Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 23. All subsequent quotations of Hughes's poems will be of this edition and the number of page will be marked parenthetically. If the publishing date of a poem is earlier than 1926, the poem later appeared in one of the collections that the range of this discussion includes.

dignified, almost mythic creatures. The woman as a performer, as a narrator, transmits mental and historical inheritance to the next generation, and therefore maintains these values.

No concise study of Hughes's poetry can leave out his most anthologized, and yet the most uncharacteristic poem[57]: "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921). The poem voices the pan-Africanist tendencies of the New Negro movement, and the notion of coherence of the black community in both its history and cultural heritage. It is imbued with racial pride and history. The composition starts with what seems like an invocation of an individual, which corresponds with the title whose definite article suggests a personal relationship between the speaker and the subject of the poem:

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like rivers. (23)

After this line, the individual "I" changes into the collective one; from "I" as a "Negro" to "I" as the "Negro" race. The race is portrayed as not only an onlooker of the origins of humankind, but also as an active participant in its further development:

> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
> went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
> bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient dusky rivers.
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (23)

Temporally, the poem moves from the very beginning of civilisation – "young dawns" – to modern history, and it also oversees generations of "Negroes" both in Africa and America. There is no distinction between Africans and Americans, the unifying element is the flow of the rivers as well as blood in veins – unceasing,

[57] Karen Jackson Ford, "Do Right to Write Right: Langston Hughes's Aesthetics of Simplicity," *Twentieth Century Literature* 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1992): 436. https://www.jstor.org/stable/441785

and therefore similar both to time and history. The community is coherent – history and cultural heritage are welded together. The awareness of the valuable ancestry that culturally contributed to the civilisation is represented by the depth of the race's soul emphatically mentioned at the poem's beginning and end.

Though race for Hughes is not a question of territory – a "Negro" in Egypt or Congo is the same as the "Negro" of American south – the topography of the ancestral Africa bears different connotations than the American soil. In Africa, the "Negro" is living in nurturing deltas of great rivers, "lulled to sleep" by the sounds of water, and strong enough to celebrate Nile with pyramid-building. This romantic imagination is juxtaposed with "muddy bosom" of Mississippi overlooking the travel of anti-slavery president Lincoln, bitterly reminding the fact that "to be sold down the river was the worst fate that could overtake a slave in times of bondage"[58]. Though the black community is not different at different places, the experience certainly differs depending on social setting.

Africa as a constituent of African American identity appears in numerous other poems – both "Danse Africaine" (1924) and "Poem" (1923) capture an individual within the romanticized environment of the jungle. In these poems, it is not only blood itself or stories of history, but music that wakes an inherent racial identity within its listeners. Rhythms and sounds of tom-toms, symbols of African traditions and heritage, are mingling with the very essence of identity and consciousness. The ancestral customs stand as warming and exciting against the civilisation that is purged of any primeval links to one's identity. "Negro" (1922) plays with similar themes as "The Negro Speaks", though marbled with much more dismal and melancholic mood. "Our Land" (1923) presents an escapist fantasy, depicting romanticized vision of Africa, supporting the territorial patriotism of the race. The collective "we", suggesting the coherence of the race and harmonious expressing of opinions, acknowledges the unattainability of Africa, which is portrayed as the promised land, the garden of Eden full of sun and wild but wholesome jungle. There is no longer the transcendental element of

[58] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 55.

voice, river, or music, the poem stands on the sharp contrasts between now versus then, here and there, or this and that:

> Ah, we should have a land of joy,
> Of love and joy and wine and song,
> And not this land where joy is wrong. (32)

Another Hughes's poem, though published much later than the previously mentioned works, voices a very different perspective on the "homeland" of the "Negro". The inaccessibility of Africa is suggested already in "Our Land" but finds much stronger representation in "Afro-American Fragment" (1930). Governing emotions of this poem are alienation and distance from something which should be familiar. Africa in this poem is recognized as a mythic, and to large extent, constructed symbol, very different from Africa that has been authentic for and experienced by the first generations of American slaves. As the memory of the land is fragmented, so is the poem in its form[59]:

> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa.
> Not even memories alive
> Save those that history books create,
> Save those that songs
> Beat back into the blood –
> Beat out of blood with words sad-sung
> In strange un-Negro tongue –
> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa. (129)

The poem acknowledges that there is an African heritage in the African American soul, there are genetic and musical links to the continent. The music of "Danse Africaine" is now a music of strangers. These links are only partially and poorly comprehensible – only fragmentary. African American blues – "words sad-sung" – certainly has a piece of African music in it, but the languages of the African and American "Negro" are different. The voices of African ancestry are still speaking, though "[s]ubdued and time-lost" by the middle passage, but the uncertainty about

[59] Patrick Bernard, "Langston Hughes, the Tom-Tom, and the Discursive Place of Memory in Culture," *The Langston Hughes Review* 17 (Fall/Spring, 2002): 44-45. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26434740

its accessibility leaves a pressing question: Can something so distant as Africa still represent a valuable basis of one's identity? Hughes clearly concludes, replying in the negative:

> Through some vast mist of race
> There comes this song
> I do not understand
> This song of atavistic land,
> Of bitter yearning lost
> Without a place –
> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa's
> Dark face. (129)

3.2 Harlem

As has been already noted, African American community was undergoing major changes during the first decades of the 20th century. One of them was the spatial change naturally resulting in changes of lifestyle. African Americans were, for various reasons – the racial oppression at the South stands probably the highest – heading north, settling mostly in big cities, and therefore becoming "an urban rather than a rural people"[60]. Hughes's oeuvre often offers a reflection of this urban experience of African Americans living in urban areas, and most importantly, living in Harlem.

Harlem occupies an extremely important personal role for African Americans in general, but also functions as an ideological reference for the New Negro movement which was very urban-centred, as the number of essays in the anthology taking life in the cities as a subject matter, indicates. In his pivotal study, David Levering Lewis states that

> Almost everything seemed possible above 125th Street in the early twenties for these Americans who were determined to thrive separately to better proclaim the ideals of integration. You could be black and proud, politically assertive and economically independent, creative and disciplined – or so it seemed.[61]

[60] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 14.
[61] David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 103.

Harlem was a symbol of North, freedom, and opportunity. On numerous occasions it presents the American ideal of self-made man finally accessible for African Americans[62]. This myth, as it is a myth as we will discern later through the prism of Hughes's poetry, was supported by some of the authors in the *New Negro* anthology. Kellogg in his essay "The Negro Pioneers" uses the word "rebirth"[63] to describe the transition of African Americans into the urban setting with its numerous opportunities and elevates the migration to something fundamentally revolutionary: by moving North, a new culture emerges, and most importantly, the "Negro" becomes an American, because he enters a fundamentally white process of Americanization[64]. He is both an immigrant and pioneer, his consciousness "fresh with the tang of growth and expansion", feeling "the vigorous of individual initiative which we like to associate with American character"[65]. Johnson, in his essay "Harlem: The Culture Capital", depicts Harlem as a place of plenty and prosperity, equal to the whites' "standards" about perfect society. The Harlem society is hard-working, responsible, and competent, and so shatters several racial stereotypes. As the social and economic condition of the "Negro" changes, so does the community and its culture of "movement, color, gayety, singing, dancing, boisterous laughter and loud talk"[66].

In the introductory essay to *The New Negro*, Locke claims that Harlem becomes a place of catalysis of the "Negro" culture, connecting members of various ethnicities, classes, backgrounds, and also races: Harlem is "the laboratory of a great race-welding"[67]. Johnson, in "The Culture Capital," extends this metaphor from Locke's non-white community to the whole New York society – for several reasons, Harlem is not a segregated ghetto, but an integral part of New York, and therefore, represents a copybook example of ideal relationships between "Negroes" and whites. Though Harlem is a city within a city, it equally mixes and blends in its surroundings, and thus, Johnson beliefs, there is a "small probability

[62] Cf. Success stories as described by Lewis in *When Harlem Was in Vogue,* 109-12.
[63] Paul U. Kellogg, "The Negro Pioneers," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 271.
[64] George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 430.
[65] Kellogg, "The Negro Pioneers," 274.
[66] James Weldon Johnson, "Harlem: The Culture Capital," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 309.
[67] Locke, "The New Negro," 8-7.

that Harlem will ever be a point of race friction between the races in New York"[68]. In the views of these New Negro movement thinkers, the "Negro" has finally achieved a decent, unprecedently integral and valuable position within the American society.

For reasons stated above, Harlem was obviously a place of fascination, and therefore became a natural source of inspiration for many artists, literary or other[69]. Especially Hughes's earlier Harlem poems resonate with what Johnson sees as an essential characteristic of the urban community quoted above – movement, buoyancy, and mirth. A significant amount of Hughes's poems focuses on the Harlem night-life in cabarets and clubs, full of singing and dancing, joy of living and the beauty of the black (especially female) body. Poems such as "Cat and the Saxophone (2 a.m.)" (1926) or "Negro Dancers" (1925) present a mixture of visual and auditory perceptions, "Harlem Sweeties" (1942) adds another dimension to the perception of beauty, and that is of taste. Shuffling bodies and loud music merge into one whirling picture of light-heartedness:

> Soft light on the tables,
> Music gay,
> Brown-skin steppers
> In a cabaret. (44)

Davis states that earlier poems, especially those of *The Weary Blues* collection, are not yet complex, and therefore less "realistic," in the artistic rendering of the life in the urban centre[70]. With later writings, however, Hughes pieces much more "realistic" mosaic of Harlem. The poem "Negro Servant" (1930) provides a double-sided view on the Harlem life – the one that juxtaposes the citizens and their life in the daytime, and the nightlife which is a mere escape from the social position held by an individual during the day:

> At six o'clock, or seven, or eight,
> You're through.
> You've worked all day.
> Dark Harlem waits for you
> The bus, the sub–

[68] Johnson, "Harlem: The Culture Capital," 310.
[69] Arthur P. Davis, "The Harlem of Langston Hughes's Poetry," in *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen (Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986), 135-6.
[70] Davis, "The Harlem of Langston Hughes's Poetry," 138.

Pay-nights a taxi
Through the park.
O, drums of life in Harlem after dark!
O, dreams!
O, songs!
O, saxophones at night!
O, sweet relief from faces that are white! (131)

The black Harlem nightlife stands in opposition of the daytime white community for whom the African Americans have to provide. Night is an embodiment of freedom, relief, a time that allows the authentic "tribal" expression of music and dance. In the night, Harlem becomes homely, familiar, truly "theirs", that is belonging to the "Negro". In some poems, this sense of freedom and triumphal possession of the neighbourhood is violated by white faces that come from the outside. The world of "wild laughter" clashes with the world of "salt tears":

A party of whites from Fifth Avenue
Came tippin into Dixie's to get a view.
(...)
While a tall white woman
In an ermine cape
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of rape,
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of rope,
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of flame,
And thought of something
Without a name. (181)

Poems such as the quoted "Death in Harlem" (1935) or "Disillusion" (1925) clearly set straight the record of Johnson's and Locke's views on Harlem. Yes, Harlem is a place of mirth and racial togetherness, but equally it is a place of oppression, struggle and one is always threatened that their illusions about the city will lead to bitter disappointment.

4. "The Star Seeking I": America

The whole *New Negro* anthology resonates with optimism and will to change things for the better as regards cultural and social conditions of the "Negro". Little do the authors focus on the institutional and political environment surrounding their ideas and proposals; they hardly mention terms such as slavery or segregation. If they do, it is usually a brief reference, a mere glance backwards, an acknowledgement of such history or an expression of pity since slavery stripped the race of prestige[71]. The whole movement, and therefore the anthology as well, is preoccupied with the question of aesthetic or culture-building rather than with the social environment and its influence on African Americans' everyday life – the focus of the movement was, arguably, too little on the problem of finances and labour.

A similar ethos of joyful anticipation of a better tomorrow is also present in Hughes's first poetry collection – *The Weary Blues* – published in 1926. Though many poems bear a critical stance towards society, the collection is still less concerned with African Americans' political and social condition than Hughes's later work is. The general trend in Hughes's poetry is that of growing bitterness and dissatisfaction with deferred promises. Nonetheless, as the word deferred itself suggests, there is still an invariable trait of Hughes's poetry that can be found, though to a varying degree, in most of his poetry: hope and perseverance despite the stagnating or even deteriorating situation of the Black people. As early as Hughes's second collection, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), the poetry mostly abandons the "romantic bohemianism"[72] of *The Weary Blues* and focuses more on the "impersonal, more [on] other people"[73] than on Hughes himself. The author describes the title of the collection, a description which applies to Hughes's later work as well, in the following quote:

> The whole book was largely about people like that, workers, roundabouts, and singers, and job hunters on Lenox Avenue in New York, or Seventh Street in Washington or South State in Chicago –

[71] Locke, "The New Negro", 14.
[72] George E. Kent, *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), 27.
[73] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 264.

> people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten, buying furniture in the installment plan, filling the house with roomers to help pay the rent, hoping to get a new suit for Easter – and pawning that suit before the Fourth of July – that was why I called my book *Fine Clothes to the Jew.*[74]

As has already been suggested in the previous chapter during the analysis of Hughes's use of the trope of Africa[75], Hughes saw himself primarily as an American[76]. At the same time, he cleaves to the historicity of his poems, acknowledges that there are experiences for the "Negro" beyond American slavery. After all, as Huggins remarks, "[r]ather than search abroad for the essence of Negro identity, Hughes's conviction of his Americanness made him use the materials of his native land"[77]. If Hughes wanted to base the African American identity on their experience in America, he had to treat the country in its complexity and the entirety of its approach to its "darker brother". Therefore, Hughes does not shun the controversial aspects of American life and society as the *New Negro* anthology writers often did. On the contrary, Hughes adamantly points to injustices that African Americans had to face in their home country.

4.1 "America – the vision": Racism and Segregation

The feeling of being American and yet not being treated as an American citizen inevitably creates a "double consciousness", almost a schizophrenia. How Hughes feels about his country can be explored by analysing one of his earliest poems, "The South" (1922). The primary structural strategy upon which the poem is built is contrast. Contrast, however, is what constitutes the America of Hughes's times as well. To name a few: the South offered different conditions for the "Negro" than the North; the promises of the country in general were hugely different from the reality; and even as the post-war self-assertiveness of the "New Negro" increased, so did the racism[78]. Like the whole country, the South is Janus-faced,

---

[74] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 264.
[75] Cf. Jean Wagner, *Black Poets of the United States: From Paul Laurence Dunbar to Langston Hughes to Langston Hughes*, transl. Kenneth Douglas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 454.
[76] Cf. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 179.
[77] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 179.
[78] Cf. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 56; Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (College Station: A & M University Press, 1997), 13; J. Saunders Redding, "The

offering both warmth and natural beauties, but also cruelty and the omnipresent threat of lynching. The "Negro" "would love her / But she spits in [his] face" (27); he is also willing to "give her many rare gifts / but she turns her back upon [him]" (27). Seeking the alienated and alienating urban settings in the North seems to be an option, even though this choice produces loss and uprootedness.

Almost 20 years later, Hughes composes "Southern Mammy Sings" (1941), and voices the concerns of the South through a direct participant in the southern life. There is a clear aspect of familiarity and love for the region in "The South", which changes into "overpowering fatigue a generation later"[79] in "Southern Mammy". The mammy is "gettin' tired! / Lawd!" (227), because she still observes the same degree of violence in the South as always, with no change for the better in sight – the boy who proposes the freedom of all is lynched and killed. However, the theme of racial violence appears much earlier in Hughes's poetry – in the 1927 poem "Song for a Dark Girl", included in *Fine Clothes*, where another southern speaker[80] gives an account of their lover's death:

> Way Down South in Dixie
> (Break the heart of me)
> They hung my black young lover
> To a cross roads tree. (104)

In this poem, despair and fatigue have another dimension – religion. The speaker states that "I asked the white Lord Jesus / What was the use of prayer," (104) because religion, though it promises an ideal world or at least hope, appears to have no more effect on the white society than on the black, and therefore loses its value for both those who suffer under discrimination and those who discriminate.

Another poem centred around the practice of lynching, "Lynching Song" (1938), voices the idea that, for example, Douglass suggested many years before – that racial violence and slavery do not harm only the victims, but have a dehumanising

---

New Negro Poet in the Twenties," in *Modern Black Poets*, ed. Donald B. Gibson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 19.

[79] Miller, *The Art and Imagination*, 43.

[80] The lack of details hampers the determination of the gender of the speaker. Even the title suggests that both readings – the speaker being male or female – are possible: the song maybe written for the dark girl to sing or to mourn her death.

effect on the perpetrators as well. The poem expresses a threat, no matter how we read it:

> Pull it, boys,
> With a bloody cry.
> Let the black boy spin
> While the white folks die.
>
> *The white folks die?*
> *What do you mean –*
> *The white folks die?*
>
> That black boy's
> Still body
> Says:
> NOT I. (214)

As a consequence of white violence, either humanity dies in the "white folks", or they will die themselves – according to the proverb "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". Either way, the provocative connotations of the poem are unsettling, as for most whites in Hughes's time was his comparison of Scottsboro boys to Jeanne d'Arc or Gandhi[81].

From the early 1930s to approximately the early 1950s[82], radical ideologies influenced Hughes's poetics. "Tired" (1931) and "Share-Croppers" (1935) both voice a very similar theme: slavery and racism never really disappeared from American society. To a large extent, it only changed into institutional segregation; but, in any case, the reality is very similar to the years before "liberation". "Share-Croppers" definitely bears strong socialist connotations, but "Tired" acknowledges that the world will never become "good / And beautiful and kind" (135), and offers a solution for this problem – a violent response: a solution would be to "cut the world in two – / And see what worms are eating / At the rind" (135). Much of Hughes's poetry of this period calls for violent action, or at least for revolution, in which all workers should unify for cleansing the world of mean capitalist oppressors[83].

---

[81] Hughes, "Scottsboro," in *Collected Poems*, 142-3.
[82] Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, 204.
[83] Cf. For example "Good Morning Revolution," 162, or "Always the Same," 165, both in *Collected Poems*.

In some poems, Hughes elaborates on the question of segregation and the colour-line in a less militant or even playful way. “Merry-Go-Round” (1942) points out the nonsensicality of “Jim Crow’s” law. The setting of the poem is suggested by its subtitle: “Colored child at carnival”. The child states that

> Down South on the train
> There’s a Jim Crow car.
> On the bus we're put in the back –
> But there ain’t no back
> To a merry-go-round! (240)

Segregation is closely linked to another problem of American society that Hughes considered a minor problem, but a very dramatic one[84] – mixed blood and the consequent practice of “passing”. In “The Paradox of Color,” White states that “color prejudice creates certain attitudes of mind on the part of some colored people which form color lines within color line”[85]. Hughes wrote short stories on this topic, as well as drama and several poems – for example the often anthologised “Cross” (1925) or “Mulatto” (1927). The chronologically earlier poem, “Cross” (1925), asks a question about economic prosperity, which is inevitably bound to life quality, that depends on one’s race. The speaker, the son of a white father and black mother, wonders:

> My old man died in a fine big house.
> My ma died in a shack.
> I wonder where I’m gonna die,
> Being neither white nor black? (59)

There are ambiguous implications of such a question: Does the speaker have an opportunity to pass as white and therefore claim a better life than his mother? Or will he share with her the tragedy of being black in the segregated world?

4.2 “America is seeking tomorrow”: Democracy

In his essay “My America”, Hughes articulates some of his beliefs about the nation, about its ideals and paradoxes. He states that “the phrase about ‘liberty and

[84] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 243.
[85] Walter White, “The Paradox of Color,” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 366.

justice' does not apply to me. I am an American – but I am a colored American."[86] Nor, he implies, does the American dream, nor the promises about democracy and equality. But Hughes believes, these are for everyone and do not apply conditionally. He also believes that change is possible and that African Americans can help the country to live up to its own expressed expectations[87].

Two Hughes's earlier poems, "Youth"[88] (1924) and "Walkers with the Dawn" (1925), both printed in *The New Negro* anthology, resonate with hopeful anticipation of change and betterment for the "Negro" race[89]:

> We have tomorrow
> Bright before us
> Like a flame.
>
> Yesterday
> A night-gone thing,
> A sun-down name. (39)

A much later poem, "The Southern Negro Speaks" (1941) is stripped of the romantic idealism present in the previous poems and reveals the reality of American life. In *The Big Sea*, Hughes remarks that "[s]trangely undemocratic doings take place in the shadow of the world's greatest democracy"[90]. "The Southern Negro" represents a poetic expression of this statement, relating the interior social and political situation in America, and the American efforts to promote democracy worldwide. The speaker reveals the irony between the democracy promised and the "democracy" performed:

> I reckon they must have
> Forgotten about me
> When I hear them say they gonna
> Save Democracy.
> Funny thing about white folks
> Wanting to go and fight
> Way over in Europe
> For freedom and light

[86] Langston Hughes, "My America," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 16, no. 6 (February 1943): 335, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2261766.
[87] Hughes, "My America," 336.
[88] Entitled "Poem" in both the anthology and *The Weary Blues*, appeared in *The Dream Keeper* with added triplet: "We march! / Americans together, / We march!".
[89] Cf. Locke, "The New Negro," 9: "To all of this the New Negro is keenly responsive as an augury of a new democracy in American culture."
[90] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 206.

(...)
Let's leave our neighbor's eye alone
And look after our own mote –
Cause I sure don't understand what the meaning can be
When folks talk about freedom –
And Jim Crow me? (238)

Hughes often uses the trope of spatial and light dynamics – as apparent from "Walkers", "Youth," and "The Southern Negro"; he builds many of his poems on basic dichotomies: light is associated with hope and freedom; darkness, on the other hand, represents racial oppression, fear, and suffering. The poem "I, Too" (1925), also reprinted in *The New Negro* anthology, uses space as the basis of an uncomplicated metaphor for segregation – "the darker brother" is the inferior one[91], and therefore lives in a different space than the rest of American society. However, there is a hint of a promising future, which will bring not only "stronger" African Americans who will fight segregation, but also recognition of their achievements and contributions within American society – both of which were, after all, fundamental assumptions of the New Negro movement[92]:

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed–

I, too, am America. (46)

Donald B. Gibson claims that Hughes, similar to Walt Whitman, whose poetic influence on Hughes can be traced particularly in this poem, is a "democrat to the bone" and that "I, Too" is testimony to his faith in the American ideal[93]. The ending suggests that the situation of "double consciousness" will be resolved, and

[91] Locke expresses the same sentiment as Hughes in "I, Too" in the following quote for "The New Negro," 11: "He [the New Negro] resents being spoken of as a social ward or minor and to being regarded a chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sick man of American Democracy."
[92] Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 400.
[93] Donald B. Gibson, "The Good Black Poet and the Good Gray Poet: The Poetry of Hughes and Whitman," in *Modern Black Poets*, 44-45.

the "darker brother" will achieve the status of full citizenship in the whole peculiar social project called America. Nonetheless, years later, Hughes voices a very similar message to that of "I, Too" in "Let America Be America Again" (1936), in which he uses the mythic colonial period as a point of reference to appraise the development of American democracy – as R. Baxter Miller puts it, Hughes "harshly mistakes the country itself for the ideal"[94]. This poem was written during Hughes's leftist period and therefore addressed all the "oppressed", acknowledging the universality of the struggle. He calls on the proletariat to "make America again" into what it was at the very beginning: the dream. For Hughes, apparently, not much had changed throughout the 1920s and 1930s, if he felt the continuing need to comment on things he had been commenting on from the beginning of his career.

4.3 "America – the dream": The American Dream, and the Response

As apparent from the previous analysis, equality, freedom, and democracy constitute, for Langston Hughes, the basis of the American dream. Being a "central ideology of Americans"[95], the American dream can have many definitions depending on the historical epoch and its competitors. It can be easily reduced to the economic or material dimension[96]; but Hughes rarely ponders it from this point of view[97]. If "[the American dream] proposes that opportunities are equally based and closely associated with other American values such as freedom and equality"[98]; and if Hughes, as he does, constantly reveals through his poetry that freedom and equality are by no means present in America; one can easily conclude that Hughes "can be hardly said to put much confidence in [the

[94] Miller, *The Art and Imagination*, 52.
[95] Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): xi.
[96] Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, 36.
[97] In his poetry, Hughes often records the economic situation of African Americans, but rarely with reference to the American dream. If he does, these poems usually depict African Americans as those who helped the whites to realize their share of the dream, but who, because of social situation, seem not to be able to fulfil their own dreams.
[98] Joslyn Armstrong et.al., "'Dream Deferred': How Discrimination Impacts the American Dream Achievement for African Americans," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 3 (2019): 229. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021934719833330

dream]"[99]. This, however, is a false conclusion, as this subchapter will try to elucidate.

The whole New Negro movement emphasised the need of every individual to contribute to the "racial uplift," stressing the capability of the "Negro" to prove that the American dream is colour-blind[100]: "[m]ost black men," Huggins claims, "wanted to say that this promise of American life was theirs – logically, rightfully, morally – as much as it was other men's"[101]. Hughes, on the other hand, is clearly aware that there is much more to achievement of the American dream than individual will, though even he succumbs to the ethos of the "New Negro" movement, especially early in his career. In "Dreams" (1923), later reprinted in *The Dream Keeper*, he proposes that dreams are essential for survival, the only thing whose vision can help individuals to carry on in life despite unfavourable circumstances. Without dreams, there is no "spirit of the self"[102]:

> Hold fast to dreams
> For if dreams die
> Life is a broken-winged bird
> That cannot fly. (32)

But as early as in the eponymous poem from TDK, Hughes acknowledges the disparity between the African American dream and reality: he offers to be the dream keeper of the community, so he will wrap all the hopes of a better future "[i]n a blue cloud-cloth / Away from the too-rough fingers / Of the world" (45).

Hughes, and most African Americans, realised that the promise of the dream and its realisation are two different things. Hochschild notices that "[w]hen people recognise that chances for success are slim or getting slimmer, the whole tenor of the American dream changes dramatically for the worse" and that "the better the dream works for other people, the more devastating is failure for the smaller and smaller proportion of people left behind"[103]. In "Star Seeker" (1926), and later in

[99] Kent, *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*, 55.
[100] Cf. Most notably Johnson's "Harlem: The Culture Capital" in *The New Negro* anthology and its numerous success stories and general industriousness of African Americans.
[101] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 139.
[102] Kent, *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*, 57.
[103] Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, 27-29.

"Freedom Seeker" (1927), Hughes has already expressed the dangers of the American dream – it can be both a life force and the doom for the dreamer:

> I have been a seeker
> Seeking a flaming star,
> And the flame white star
> Has burned my hands
> Even from afar.
>
> Walking in a dream-dead world
> Circled by iron bars,
> I sought a singing star's
> Wild beauty.
> Now behold my scars. (64)

The light that burns the dreamer in this poem is shaded by the wall of racism in "As I Grew Older" (1926):

> It was a long time ago.
> I have forgotten my dream.
> But it was there then,
> In front of me,
> Bright like a sun–
> My dream.
>
> And then the wall rose,
> Rose slowly,
> Slowly,
> Between me and my dream. (93)

However much the dream appears to be unattainable, for Hughes it – or at least its memory – is still there. And as long as the presence of the dream holds, though shaded, the wall can be shattered. The speaker invokes all his inner strength to fight and break the wall, because "[w]alls have been known / To fall" (193), as the speaker of "Dusk" (1936), who encourages all those who are "[w]andering in the dusk", proclaims.

Hughes obviously realises the complexity of the American dream. To a large extent, he problematises the persuasion that individuals are responsible for the (un)fulfilment of their share of the dream – whatever its definition is. His whole oeuvre shows the continuity of problematic elements between the word given to the "Negro" people and the deed that followed. His response to this disparity includes the period in his writing that was influenced by the leftist ideology.

When Hughes, who was immensely interested in the working classes, saw how "Negro" dreams are constantly deferred, he turned to bolshevism, which seemed to be very tempting at the time because to many, including Hughes, it seemed to have "done away with race hatred and landlords – two devils that [Hughes] knew well at first hand"[104]. Hughes later in his career dismissed this ideology as a solution for the problems African Americans faced, when he seems to have realized that what "the Negro especially suffers from is White America, not capitalist America"[105]. What, on the other hand, can be found throughout his writing is another reaction to the hardships of life in America – perseverance. For example, in poems such as "Mother to Son" (1922), "The Negro Mother" (1931) or "*If*-ing" (1941), the vision of a better tomorrow or humour, respectively, are sources of inner strength to continue in one's quest for freedom, equality, and/or material security.

Hughes also does not hide his displeasure with those who promised to lead the change in society. Locke writes that "if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least (...) celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development"[106]. Hughes, in contrast, questions whether any "group development" is possible for African Americans if they cannot fully benefit from the privileges of democracy. In several poems, he criticises various "lacks" of Black "leadership": it's insufficient vigour in fighting for Black rights in negotiations with their white counterparts[107]; their alienation from those whom they should fight for[108]; and the inauthenticity of their agenda[109]. As Wintz appositely puts it, Hughes senses that ultimately, "[e]verything (...) fell short of its goals"[110].

[104] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 52.
[105] Wagner, *Black Poets*, 436.
[106] Locke, "The New Negro", 16.
[107] Hughes, "To Certain Negro Leaders," in *Collected Poems*, 136.
[108] Hughes, "To Certain Intellectuals," 43; "Visitors to the Black Belt," 215, both in *Collected Poems*.
[109] Hughes, "To Certain "Brothers"," in *Collected Poems*, 55.
[110] Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, 29.

5. "Tears are my Laughter": Langston Hughes's Use of Music

African American musical expression was, naturally, a concern of many African American scholars – for example, James Weldon Johnson, novelist, and NAACP activist, published *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925) and *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* (1926), as well as *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922). These were all anthologies, but very important first collections of their subject matter. Besides visual and literary art, music was central to the New Negro movement and its high aspirations[111]. However, strangely enough, the defining *New Negro* anthology includes only two essays relevant for the discussion about African American music and the New Negro aesthetic elaborations – Locke's "The Negro Spirituals" and Rogers's "Jazz at Home". As evident from the titles, Locke and Rogers draw upon the tradition of spirituals and jazz, respectively. Moreover, each of those contributions to the anthology represents two different approaches to black music and aesthetics within the movement[112]. Gilroy emphasises the importance of music to the movement and its production, and claims that it becomes during the period "a creative model for the visual arts and blueprint for novelists and poets"[113].

The New Negro movement relied heavily on folk art as "the unrefined source for the new art"[114] destined to play a pivotal role in racial promotion. Therefore, many of Hughes's contemporaries were naturally interested in collecting folk art because they were encouraged to do so and possibly felt that during the transformation from the Old to the New "Negro", an essential part of the African American identity might otherwise be lost[115]. For example, both Zora Neale Hurston, interested in the folk tradition as an author and anthropologist, and

[111] Paul Gilroy, "Modern Tones," in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 108.
[112] Gilroy, "Modern Tones," 107.
[113] Gilroy, "Modern Tones," 108.
[114] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 10.
[115] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 76.

Sterling Brown exploited folk art for their creative production[116]. Distinctly African American expressions were, however, not always a source of pride for African Americans, as Hughes himself illuminates in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", using the episode of a "prominent Negro clubwoman in Philadelphia" who, because of the "Puritan standards" imposed on her by the white society, "turns up her nose at jazz and all its manifestations – likewise almost everything else distinctly racial"[117]. Some African Americans in Hughes's time clearly acquired (white-valorised) "middle-class" aesthetic values; for those who did so, spirituals, blues or jazz were not "appropriate" musical genres.

Alain Locke, in his essay "The Negro Spirituals", praises spirituals as representative specimens of the "Negro's" folk tradition and as "the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America"[118]. He acknowledges the "primitive" basis of spirituals and the lack of their high artistic merit. On the other hand, Locke sees spirituals as a malleable material for transformation into a high cultural expression[119]. Both Du Bois and Locke are representative of what Steven C. Tracy calls "the Old Guard", which "[balances] their middle-class values and racial pride"[120]. If, as seems to have been the case, spirituals were for Locke "connected with white, middle-class religious values"[121], it is clear why he chooses to praise spirituals rather than blues, which are from his elitist aesthetic judgements mere work-song of strictly secular character[122], and therefore prone to depicting even the less "respectable" parts of African American experience. The clash of what art should represent, according to Locke, and what is not convenient for promotion is evident in this juxtaposition.

Another approach to music represented in the anthology is connected to a fairly new cultural movement – jazz. According to J. A. Rogers, jazz is fundamentally a "sophisticated urban and cosmopolitan phenomenon of an inescapably modernist

[116] Steven C. Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2.
[117] Hughes, "The Negro and the Racial Mountain," 30.
[118] Alain Locke, "The Negro Spirituals," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 199.
[119] Gilroy, "Modern Tones," 107.
[120] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 17.
[121] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 27.
[122] Locke, "The Negro Spirituals," 205.

type"[123]. Rogers links the genesis of jazz to the blues tradition: by reshaping the blues, jazz came to life. Rogers acknowledges inherently African origins of jazz and its "primitive" elements, but what formed this artistic expression is, in Rogers's opinion, the American soil and urban setting. He calls jazz a "common property", something that "absorbed the national spirit"[124]. By having these qualities and the "mocking disregard for formality"[125], Rogers believes that jazz has the potential for socially redeeming power, which connects his ideas about this musical form to the whole premise of the New Negro movement – where jazz was, for the most part, regarded and presented as another uniquely creative African American contribution to American culture that could be used by the movement for ideological purposes.

Curiously, both Locke and Rogers were obviously aware of the blues – with Rogers's even acknowledging its essential role in the development of jazz. Neither of them pays particular attention to blues, though. For the older generation of "New Negroes", "the blues" was apparently a cultural blind alley. For the younger generation, the generation of Hughes and Hurston, the blues tradition was worth keeping alive and represented a potentiality for prolific creative production[126] and cultural vindication. Therefore, it is probably not surprising that music is central to Hughes's poetics. The most relevant collections for the study of Hughes's approach to music are those that were published before and after his socialist digression, i.e. *The Weary Blues*, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* and *Shakespeare in Harlem*. Hughes's effort for jazz-inspired poetic experiments culminates in his later collections, mainly in *The Montage of the Dream Deferred* and *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*; but these collections, although they have attracted much positive critical evaluation, do not fall within the scope of this discussion. It is important to mention that Hughes used blues and jazz extensively. These two genres and their influence on his poetry will be explored here. Still, he also used many other genres as formal or thematic inspiration for his poetry. His

[123] Gilroy, "Modern Tones," 107.
[124] J. A. Rogers, "Jazz at Home," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 220.
[125] Rogers, "Jazz at Home," 223.
[126] Ron Eyrman and Andrew Jamison, "The movements of black music: from the New Negro to civil rights," in *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 90-2.

verses resonate with spirituals, gospels, ragtime and/or be-bop. But it is blues and jazz that are most prominently represented in his poetry.

Many critics praise Hughes for being the first poet who introduced the blues form into modern poetry[127]; Nathan Irvin Huggins goes as far as stating that "[w]ere it not for Langston Hughes, we would have almost no specific notice of that art from the Harlem writers"[128]. Hughes himself clarifies the reasons behind his use of blues in his poetry as follows:

> I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street – gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going, their songs – those of Seventh Street – had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going.[129]

He does not see blues only as a matter of fixed artistic form but also thematically as having certain sentimental qualities. Therefore, some of his poems can be described as blues poems even though the form does not correspond with the traditional or any other variety of blues composition[130]. In the above quote, Hughes also voices the idea that understanding folk music means finding a key to the African American soul and experience, which is, after all, the same attitude that Du Bois and Locke held on spirituals and Rogers on jazz.

5.1 Blues

There is a generally accepted theory that blues was created from work songs and hollers of the illiterate rural African American population, who needed an expression that would respond to and reflect their situation[131], though Steven C. Tracy claims that "it is impossible to say when the first blues was sung"[132]. Being a creation of the "low-down folk", blues seems to be an obvious option for Hughes's artistic production. If blues serves as a reflective surface to convey the

[127] Cf. Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes,* vol. I, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66; David Chinitz, "Literacy and Authenticity: The Blues Poems of Langston Hughes," *Callaloo* 19, no. 1 (Winter, 1996), 177; Margaret Walker, "New Poets," *Phylon* 11, no. 4 (4th Qtr., 1950), 351; Patricia A. Johnson and Walter C. Farrell, Jr., "How Langston Hughes Used the Blues," MELUS 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1979), 55.
[128] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 11.
[129] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 209.
[130] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 217.
[131] Eyrman and Jamison, "The movements of black music," 79.
[132] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 74.

everyday life of black masses, it must have a specific thematic focus. "Although what a particular blues is about may vary from blues to blues," claims Edward E. Waldron, "the basic content of the blues usually has to do with some form of disappointment, most commonly in love, but also in other areas of life – or maybe in just plain living"[133]. Besides other conventional blues themes, love is indeed the thematic focus of many of Hughes's poems, especially those appearing in *Fine Clothes* and *Shakespeare in Harlem*.

Thematically, Hughes's blues poems are not widely innovative. He takes numerous ideas of conventional ideas of blues as his subject matter. Most poems focus unsurprisingly on various aspects of love. A hint of innovativeness can be traced in Hughes's rendering of this emotion, which he strips of its romantic connotations. For Hughes, love is the most important[134] and omnipresent emotion, but he does not treat it as an elevated or elevating sentiment: in "In a Troubled Key" (1942), for example, it is hinted that love is what powers an artistic production that conveys the feeling, but the speaker states that "my love might turn into a knife / Instead of to a song" (249), juxtaposing the notion and reality of love. Especially in *Fine Clothes* and *Shakespeare in Harlem*, Hughes treats love very pragmatically, stressing its hurtful potential. Love can bring both joy and despair, loneliness, and misery – which is, after all, a usual conclusion of many blues songs.

Two poems that appeared in *Fine Clothes*, "Listen Here Blues" and "Lament Over Love", both originally published in 1926, are didactic at their core – female speakers in those poems are advising other women to steer clear of men. In "Lament", this message is underscored by narrating an actual experience that impelled the speaker to suicide. Several other poems articulate what happens if the warning from "Listen Here Blues" and "Lament Over Love" is not taken to heart. In "Suicide" (1926), the speaker contemplates killing herself or "that man that done [her] wrong" (82); "Bad Man" (1927) resonates with the voice of an

[133] Edward E. Waldron, "The Blues Poetry of Langston Hughes," *Negro American Literature Forum* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1971), 142. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3041417
[134] Cf. "Dressed Up," in *CP*, 80; "Young Gal's Blues," in *CP*, 123; "Love Again Blues," in *CP* 216.

unfaithful and abusive partner. Some poems, on the other hand, do not exclude positive development in a relationship, be it sexual fascination ("Ma Man") or playful affection ("Ballad of Little Sallie"). Hughes's blues poems are clearly less hypocritical than conventional poems about love and less concerned with morality, therefore freely expressing both positive and negative aspects of relationships[135].

Another typical theme of the blues is travelling and restlessness. Particularly interesting are Hughes's poems that take the dichotomy of South versus North as their subject matter. Poems in *The Weary Blues* are very urban-centred, full of dance and *carpe diem* undertones. Several poems in the *Fine Clothes* and *Shakespeare in Harlem* collections are looking back from the urban North to the rural South in blues song form and tone. In "Homesick Blues" (1926), a train that is repeatedly traversing bridges is constantly provoking in the speaker a feeling of homesickness for the South. "Po' Boy Blues" (1926), on the other hand, explicitly reveals that the North is actually an unpleasant place in which to live. The speaker is highly nostalgic and tired by the corrupting influences that lead him to misery there:

> I was a good boy,
> Never done no wrong.
> Yes, I was a good boy,
> Never done no wrong,
> But this world is weary
> An' de road is hard an' long. (83)

Similar sentiments can be found in the poem that Hughes wrote in collaboration with Wright, and which appeared in 1939 in *Opportunity* – "Red Clay Blues". The central concern of "Evenin' Air Blues", published in *Shakespeare in Harlem*, is the economic situation of the speaker that produces the blues he is singing. In this poem, Hughes rebuts the mythic picture that the New Negro movement tried to paint of the North as a place of prosperity for everyone:

> Folks, I come up North
> Cause they told me de North was fine.
> I come up North

[135] Samuel Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963), 90.

Cause they told me de North was fine.
Been up here six months –
I'm about to lose my mind.

This mornin' for breakfast
I chawed de mornin' air.
This mornin' for breakfast
Chawed de mornin' air.
But this evenin' for supper,
I got evenin air to spare. (225)

Thematically, there is apparently little diversion or enrichment in Hughes's blues poetry from conventional blues songs. Formal elements of his blues poems provide more possibilities for critical evaluation. On the most basic level, the mere introduction of blues patterns into American poetry is considered highly innovative. Margaret Walker asserts that the blues form used by Hughes is a distinctly African American contribution, "the first new Negro idiom introduced into American poetry since the time of Paul Laurence Dunbar and his Negro dialect"[136]. Traditionally, the blues stanza consists of three lines – the first line introduces a statement or a situation; the second line, sometimes with slight alternation, repeats the first line (and is therefore called the repeat line); while the last, third, line points back to the previous statements, providing resolution or even contradiction to the first two lines[137]. David Chinitz describes the effect of such a pattern as follows:

> In performance the blues stanza generates dramatic suspense as the audience anticipates the satisfying closure of rhyme and sense in the response line; this suspense gives the singer or lyricist opportunities for irony, surprise, humor, understatement and other effects. The repeat line heightens the suspense by delaying the resolution.[138]

The blues form is therefore greatly variable and offers a considerable degree of creative possibilities. There are, however, many variations that derive from the standard form. Hughes employs many stanzaic variations, as for example, reversal of the repetition: in "Only Woman Blues", the two response lines are repeated, previous lines are always different[139], or the line is broken into two shorter

[136] Walker, "New Poets", 351.
[137] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 157.
[138] Chinitz, "The Blues Poems of Langston Hughes," 178.
[139] Waldron, "The Blues Poetry," 143.

phrases[140] - which Hughes uses "Widow Woman" to create a slower, contemplative pace that reflects the theme:

> Oh, that last long ride is a
> Ride everybody must take.
> Yes, that last long ride's a
> Ride everybody must take.
> And that final stop is a
> Stop everybody must make. (259)

Hughes pushes the blues form forward and works with it creatively: he builds some poems as dialogues, even though blues songs are not usually, as opposed to spirituals, sung in a group[141]. In "Early Evening Quarrel" (1941), included in *Shakespeare in Harlem*, two voices merge in a humorous quarrel over the lack of sugar in a household, as seen from the woman's perspective. The same structural pattern of dialogue also appears in "Ballad of Little Sallie". Steven C. Tracy aptly summarises Hughes's treatment of the blues form as follows:

> Hughes worked on his blues poems with a knowledge of various traditional twelve- and eight-bar stanzas, but he added a number of his own touches. By mixing stanza forms, italicising, and working with novel line placements in traditional stanzas, Hughes extended the blues tradition in his own literary way. These blues are structurally familiar and structurally novel simultaneously, mirroring some aspect of the theme of the individual poem.[142]

There are many potential reasons why Hughes decided to use the blues pattern in his poetic production – be they autobiographical[143], ideological, commercial[144] or simply for artistic convenience. If the blues is "the classical black response to African experience in modern America"[145] arising from the black working masses, that response offers a reinforcing confluence with Hughes's aesthetic choices, which focus primarily on the "low-down folks". As regards the

[140] Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues*, 27.
[141] Waldron, "The Blues Poetry," 140.
[142] Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 170.
[143] Hughes, *Big Sea*, 205-209.
[144] Steven C. Tracy suggests that during the "Harlem Renaissance" period, when almost everything of the African American origin was in vogue, Hughes might had wished to use blues for practical reasons – as it was a favourite musical art form, he might had wanted to employ it in his poetry, and thus increase the commercial potential of his writing. Cf. *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, 143.
[145] Arnold Rampersad, "Langston Hughes," in *Voices & Visions: The Poet in America*, ed. Helen Vendler (New York: Random House, 1987): 358.

ideological aspect, Hughes was definitely encouraged by Locke to interpret the African American experience by using the forms of folk music, be it blues or, sporadically, spirituals and gospels. Locke praises Hughes's efforts in taking the musical form and using it as "mold into which the life of the plain people is descriptively poured"[146].

Reasons for Hughes's use of musical expression in his poetry are a matter of debate; the effects that the decision produces is a matter of fact. The blues definitely adds to the authenticity of Hughes's folk poetry; but besides creating a background for the voices that speak, it enables the speakers to use their very *own* poetic language and forms since the blues constitutes one of the most typical expressions of black life in America[147]. Thus, to a large extent, Hughes dissociates his poetry from the conventional (white) American poetic tradition, and after all, Western poetics in general. Not only does Hughes, by using the blues form and vocabulary, preserve the African American cultural heritage containing the aspirations and ideals of numerous generations[148], but he also invites reconsideration of this folk tradition because he shows that the folk matter can be used artistically, polished by (Black) intelligentsia, and easily become an inspiration for (Race) poetry[149]. Finally, as Charters boldly asserts, the blues can become a democratising tool, "a force in the shaping of a new society, for in the blues will be found the expression of attitudes and beliefs that will become for the American Negro part of a racial memory and part of a developing social history"[150]. All these ideological and artistic implications are more than relevant for Hughes's place in the New Negro movement.

[146] Alain Locke, "Common Clay and Poetry," in *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen (Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986), 53.
[147] Locke, "Common Clay," 53.
[148] William H. Hansell, "Black Music in the Poetry of Langston Hughes: Roots, Race, Release," *Obsidian* 4, no. 3 (Winter, 1978), 19.
[149] Steven C. Tracy, "Langston Hughes and Afro-American Vernacular Music," in *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes*, ed. Steven C. Tracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86.
[150] Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues*, 12-13.

5.2 Jazz

Jazz as a musical expression has many similarities with the blues, which is not surprising, taking into account the fact that jazz is partly based on transformation of the blues. According to Rogers, jazz was an "explosive attempt to cast off blues and be happy, carefree happy, even in the midst of sordidness and sorrow"[151], so if the blues is built upon the tension between sadness and happiness, the main emotion in jazz should be only happiness. However, for Langston Hughes, the boundary between the two musical forms is very blurry. In both "The Negro Artist" and "Jazz as Communication," he uses the terms almost interchangeably: what applies to the blues can be said about jazz, and vice versa. Both idioms also arose from the same socio-ethnic group, although in different spaces and times: Gerald Early claims that jazz is a distinctly urban genre since its genesis is tied to the urbanisation of African Americans[152]. Using a simplified dichotomy, the blues can therefore appear as the music of the "Old Negro", while jazz is logically an expression of the "New". This reasoning can probably explain the fascination with jazz among the "New Negro" scholars, and ultimately also why Rogers's essay appears in the anthology. However, as we have already seen, this logic is not convincing for Hughes, for whom the blues is still alive in the mid-forties.

In his essay included in the anthology, Rogers reveals his aesthetic hypocrisy, similar to Locke's, towards African American folk music as well. Although he praises jazz's internationalism and its "sublimated" form[153], he condemns the vulgar or informal nature of jazz[154], reflecting what Early also points to—that jazz, very similarly to the blues, was secular music for lower-class communities[155], and therefore was (or should be) rejected by most middle-class or educated blacks. Cullen, as well, in his review of *The Weary Blues*, writes that jazz poems in the collection are "interlopers in the company of the truly beautiful

[151]Rogers, "Jazz at Home," 217.
[152] Gerald Early, "Jazz and the African American Literary Tradition," National Humanities Center, accessed August 2, 2021, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/jazz.htm.
[153] Rogers, "Jazz at Home," 219.
[154] Rogers comments in "Jazz at Home," 223: "Yet in spite of its present vices and vulgarization, its sex informalities, its morally anarchic spirit, jazz has a popular mission to perform."
[155] Early, "Jazz and the Literary Tradition."

poems in other sections of the book"[156], voicing, and others', displeasure based on middle-class aesthetic prejudices. But as Hughes reveals in "Jazz as Communication," not only does jazz absorbs influences from its environment, but it also can influence other artistic spheres – and so jazz does inevitably find its way into literature[157], no matter how society responds to it. According to Hughes, jazz music is an organic, living form. And even though he was not the first writer to introduce it into American poetry, he certainly "carried it to a high level of development"[158].

If jazz is the most marked technical influence on Hughes's poetics[159], we should be able to generalise and at least vaguely define jazz poetry. In Hughes's writing, jazz appears on both the thematic and the structural levels. Thematically, as was already suggested in the second chapter, jazz is represented as an escapist tool, often associated with primitivist fantasies, sexual tension between cabaret visitors, and celebration of the black body. Poems that could be thus defined appear primarily in *The Weary Blues*: for example, "To Midnight Nan at Leroy's", "Midnight Dance", "Negro Dancers", or "Jazzonia". Themes such as representations of jazz musicians, "jazz environments"[160] – cabarets, clubs, parties – and specific "jazz atmospheres" often occur in Hughes's first two collections. Formally, Jemie defines jazz poetry based on its lack of form; he states that "[u]nlike classic blues, the jazz poem has no fixed form: it is a species of free verse which attempts to approximate some of the qualities of jazz"[161].

Hughes's understanding of jazz as communication is central for the study of his formal inclusion of jazz into his poetics, for communication or interaction is a fundamental motif in many poems that are structurally inspired by jazz. The poem that appears in *Fine Clothes*, "Jazz Band in Parisian Cabaret" (1927), articulates

---

[156] Countee Cullen, "Poet on Poet," in *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen (Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986), 37.
[157] Langston Hughes, "Jazz as Communication," *Poetry Foundation*, published October 12, 2002, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69394/jazz-as-communication.
[158] Onwuchekwa Jamie, *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 60
[159] Hansell, "Black Music in the Poetry of Langston Hughes: Roots, Race, Release," 16.
[160] Michael Borshuk, "Noisy Modernism: The Cultural Politics of Langston Hughes's Early Jazz Poetry," *The Langston Hughes Review* 17 (Fall/Spring, 2002): 4.
[161] Jamie, *An Introduction to the Poetry*, 57.

one of the concerns of Hughes's essay – that jazz is universally accessible; it is not only a musical form but an essential emotion to which every member of society can relate if they really want to. All members of society – be they of higher classes or of "less respectable" strata as depicted in "Saturday Night" (1927) – can rejoice in music and the feeling that it induces. To underpin this statement, Hughes extends this metaphor to linguistic competence and includes excerpts of conversation that are graphically differentiated from the rest of the poem, in which the speakers use several languages, and yet they understand each other: dance and jazz become their primary language. As the musicians communicate with the audience through their music, audience members use music to interact with one another. Lines in the poem are short, so the whole narrative seems to be very fast-paced, as if all the scenes are happening at the same time. The vortex-like rapid changing of images is characteristic of Hughes's jazz poems; the same structural quality is strongly present in, for example, "Brass Spittoons" as well. As in jazz improvisations, images revolve in a quick sequence around a set theme, creating a chaotic pastiche representing the character of urban life as an unstoppable struggle for survival – or at least for orientation and meaning.

The poem "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 a.m.)" (1926) is a poem in which jazz pervades the very poetic tissue. The poem has two different plotlines that are typographically indicated. Music lyrics typed in capitals mingle with the narrative of the scene. The typographical choice suggests the loudness of the music playing and its obtrusiveness as background – the lyrics support the story that unfolds in the narrative and vice versa. In some parts of the poem, it is hard to distinguish the two lines; for example, the following passage can be read as direct interaction between the song and the conversation the two people are having:

> DON'T LOVE NOBODY
> daddy.
> BUT ME.
> Say!
> EVERYBODY
> Yes? (89)

The distance between the audience and the music is minimal, if extant at all, and certainly at times disappears completely. The crowd and the singer are one, absolutely immersed in the immediate moment. The voices of the band and its auditors merge similarly in "Harlem Night Club" (1926). The change in typography in this poem is a visual representation of both the gradual heightening of the pitch of the music, its volume, and the speaker's ecstatic wish to hear the tones: "Sleek black boys in a cabaret. / Jazz-band, jazz-band, – / Play, plAY, PLAY!" (90) The repetition, syncopation, and aposiopesis are faithful formal renditions of music.

The intimate relationship between the audience, the musician, and his way of communication is the subject matter of another of Hughes's poems, probably his most anthologised: "The Weary Blues" (1926). A pianist's performance in a dimly lit cabaret is mediated by one of the spectators, who describes the connection between the stage and the auditorium, in which the piano plays the fundamental role, the music is establishing every relationship in the room. From the very beginning, the crowd and the musician are mingled, even on the linguistic level, with the ambiguity of the first three lines residing in the question of whom – "I" or "a Negro" – is described by the participial phrases "Drowning a drowsy syncopated tune, / Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon" (50). The shouts "O Blues!" and "Sweet Blues!" may be produced by any given listener or by the whole crowd according to the usual response pattern of blues; the voices represent an authentic living audience interacting with the musician.

The perspective in the second stanza changes – the immediate experience is prolonged, timeless, "far into the night," and echoing through the musician's head and possibly those of the spectators' as well. The narrator becomes an omnipresent onlooker, following the musician after the performance and reporting the musician's exhaustion. The listener was immersed in the performance, and thus the distinction between him and the performer collapsed. The musician, during his concert, transmitted a piece of culture to hearers – not "polished," "cleaned up," or "civilized" – only authentically preserved in its richness and value. Hughes's concerns about the corruption of this tradition are captured in a

later poem, “Note on Commercial Theatre” (1943) – where the speaker expresses concern, even anguish, that the mingling of distinctly African American expression into mass entertainment, however much that might expand the celebrity and/or profitability of that expression, risks compromising or losing an important part of African American identity and cultural legacy. Therefore, in Hughes’s percipient judgment, the mythic creatures and carriers – blues and jazz singers – from the lower classes must be the ones that preserve that heritage.

6. Conclusion

Langston Hughes has a special position among the New Negro thinkers and "Harlem Renaissance" authors. The ideas about the Black aesthetics and the debates on art as propaganda proposed by the New Negro leaders inspired him in his creative work, especially at the beginning of his writing career. Upon reading the first poetry collection which Hughes published in 1926 – *The Weary Blues* – it is evident that he does, to a large extent, adopt the rhetoric and ethos of the flourishing New Negro movement. Following collections, however, manifest a departure from the New Negro philosophy; Hughes's socialist orientation, be it in the political sense of the word or simply manifesting Hughes's interest in the African American masses, clashes with the movement's middle-class assimilationist values. Hughes recognizes the shallowness of the New Negro movement agenda, and, consequently, of the "Harlem Renaissance", and its insufficiency in promoting racial equality. Hughes's poetry is interlaced with stories of lower-class African Americans, whose situation was not, and could not be, resolved by artistic achievements: Despite the efforts of previous generations of leaders and promoters of Black culture, African American masses were still suffering from poverty, racism, and segregation in the 1920s just as in the 1940s, as Hughes insistently declares in his poetry. Coming from a middle-class background, Hughes, as opposed to many New Negro intellectuals, reflects both groups unpretentiously, stripping them of their stereotypical characteristics. He resurrects the rich African American folk tradition and invites its admiration rather than its condemnation in favour of "high" art, as most of the New Negro thinkers did. American democratic values and equality have to be achieved by other means than by creating "raceless" art – by communication and by acceptance, leading to a diverse society in which everyone would have her or his place, which was, after all, the original premise for American society. Langston Hughes creates a complex "Negro" art, as complex as he would like America itself to be.

7. Bibliography

Armstrong, Joslyn, et.al. "'Dream Deferred': How Discrimination Impacts the American Dream Achievement for African Americans." *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 3 (2019). 227-250. SAGE. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021934719833330

Bernard, Patrick. "Langston Hughes, the Tom-Tom, and the Discursive Place of Memory in Culture." *The Langston Hughes Review* 17 (Fall/Spring, 2002): 35-48. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26434740

Borshuk, Michael. "Noisy Modernism: The Cultural Politics of Langston Hughes's Early Jazz Poetry." *The Langston Hughes Review* 17 (Fall/Spring, 2002). 4-21. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26434738

Charters, Samuel. *The Poetry of the Blues.* New York: Oak Publications, 1963.

Chinitz, David. "Literacy and Authenticity: The Blues Poems of Langston Hughes." *Callaloo* 19, no. 1 (Winter, 1996). 177-192. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3299349

Cullen, Countee. "Poet on Poet." In *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen. 37-39. Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986.

Davis, Arthur P. "The Harlem of Langston Hughes's Poetry." In *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen. 135-142. Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Gorham: Myers Education Press, 2018. EBSCO.

Early, Gerald. "Jazz and the African American Literary Tradition." National Humanities Center. Accessed August 2, 2021. http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/jazz.htm.

Eyrman, Ron and Andrew Jamison. "The movements of black music: from the New Negro to civil rights." In *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*. 74-105. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Ford, Karen Jackson. “Do Right to Write Right: Langston Hughes’s Aesthetics of Simplicity.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1992): 436-456. https://www.jstor.org/stable/441785

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

———. “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black Author(s).” *Representations*, no. 24 (Autumn 1988): 129-155. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928478

Gibson, Donald B., ed. *Modern Black Poets*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973.

Gilroy, Paul. “Modern Tones.” In *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Richard J Powell and David A. Bailey. 102-154. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Hansell, William H. “Black Music in the Poetry of Langston Hughes: Roots, Race, Release.” *Obsidian* 4, no. 3 (Winter, 1978). 16-38. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44525684

Hochschild, Jennifer L. *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Huggins, Nathan Irving. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Hughes, Langston. *Big Sea: An Autobiography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945.

———. “Jazz as Communication.” *Poetry Foundation*. Published October 12, 2002. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69394/jazz-as-communication.

———. “Criteria of Negro Art.” In *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier. 17-23. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

———. “My Adventures as a Social Poet.” *Phylon* 8, no. 3 (Third Quarter, 1947). 205-212. https://www.jstor.org/stable/272335

———. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

———. “The Negro Artist and Racial Mountain.” In *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier. 27-30. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

———. “My America.” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 16, no. 6 (February 1943). 334-335. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2261766.

Hutchinson, George, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Jamie, Onwuchekwa. *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1973.

Johnson, Patricia A. and Walter C. Farrell, Jr. “How Langston Hughes Used the Blues.” MELUS 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1979). 55-63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/467519

Jones, Meta DuEwa. “Listening to What the Ear Demands: Langston Hughes and His Critics.” *Callaloo* 25, no. 4 (Autumn, 2002). 1144-1175. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3300277

Kent, George E. *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture.* Chicago: Third World Press, 1972.

Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue.* New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro*. New York: Atheneum, 1992.

———. “Common Clay and Poetry.” In *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*, ed. Edward J. Mullen. 53-55. Boston: G. H. Hall & Co., 1986.

Miller, R. Baxter. *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

Rampersad, Arnold. “Langston Hughes.” In *Voices & Visions: The Poet in America*, ed. Helen Vendler. 353-394. New York: Random House, 1987.

———. *The Life of Langston Hughes,* vol. I. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Schulyer, George S. “The Negro-Art Hokum.” In *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier. 24-26. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Soto, Michael. *Measuring the Harlem Renaissance: The U.S. Census, African-American Identity, and Literary Form*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016. EBSCO.

Tracy, Steven C. *Langston Hughes and the Blues.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

———. "Langston Hughes and Afro-American Vernacular Music." In *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes*, ed. Steven C. Tracy. 85-118. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Wagner, Jean. *Black Poets of the United States: From Paul Laurence Dunbar to Langston Hughes to Langston Hughes*. Transl. Kenneth Douglas. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

Waldron, Edward E. "The Blues Poetry of Langston Hughes." *Negro American Literature Forum* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1971). 140-149. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3041417

Walker, Margaret. "New Poets." *Phylon* 11, no. 4 (4th Qtr., 1950). 345-354. https://www.jstor.org/stable/272367

Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance.* College Station: A & M University Press, 1997.